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ABSTRACT

According to Knowles (1980), adults come to the learning environment when they are ready. His concept of andragogy is based on these assumptions: changes in self-concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning. Increasing concern has been placed upon the need to address the multiple cultural needs of learners and workers in all settings. Hill-Collins (1990) describes a research methodology aimed at collecting and analyzing data from marginalized persons. This Africentric feminist epistemology attempts to provide a medium through which one's interpretation of behavior and thought is grounded in the history, culture, economics, race, gender, language, and religion of those involved in the research. This perspective emphasizes the intersection of multiple, polyrhythmic realities. Polyrhythms are the multiple rhythms that flow and course through one's being. A model has been developed that represents the intersecting polyrhythmic realities based upon the Africentric feminist deconstruction of an individual's world view. Four assumptions formulate the bases for acknowledging one's polyrhythmic realities within the learning environment: concrete experience as the criterion of meaning, dialogue as the basis for assessing knowledge claims, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability. These assumptions provide the framework for giving voice. The teacher moves from the center into the margin and gives students an opportunity to share their understandings through dialogue. (Contains 12 references.) (YLB)

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An Africentric Feminist Perspective on the Role of Adult Education for Diverse Communities

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Several terms have been used to describe the field of adult education. The most common term is andragogy. Knowles (1980) introduced this term to adult education literature in the United States during the early seventies. Since the introduction of this term to the field of adult education in the United States, adult educators have used it to describe the way one should teach adults as opposed to children. Andragogy is the education of adults, while pedagogy is the education of children. Both these terms suggest a way of viewing and addressing the needs of learners within the learning environment. Throughout the seventies and eighties adult educators have often discussed and debated the differences and similarities between these two concepts.

During the 1980's and 1990's, additional attention has been given to determining what other factors effect learning and the learning environment. Multiculturalism, Africentrism, bilingualism, feminism, womanism (or Africentric Feminist Epistemology) are constructs that have been receiving limited attention in mainstream adult education literature. These constructs have led to the use of techniques and processes that encourage different ways of producing and interpreting knowledge in the adult education classroom (Brookfield, 1986; Colin and Precephs, 1991; Collard and Stalker, 1991; Flannery, 1994; Hayes, 1989; Hayes and Colin, 1994; Hemphill, 1992; Ross-Gordon, 1991; Sheared, 1994).

The intent of this paper will be to examine some of the differences and similarities between the traditional views of adult education (andragogy) and the more critical perspectives that are now emerging in the field of adult education. Particular attention will be given to addressing the differences found between andragogical assumptions (Knowles, 1980) and the Africentric Feminists epistemological assumptions (Hill-Collins, 1990) that undergird the womanist construction of "giving voice (Sheared, 1994)." While primary focus will be given to examining the differences and/or similarities between andragogy and the Africentric Feminist Epistemological assumptions, multiculturalism will also be addressed.

Andragogy

As noted above one of the most popularized terms being used to explain adult learning and the education of adults is andragogy. According to Knowles, adults come to the learning

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environment when they are ready. The adults readiness to learn is often determined by a desire to resolve a particular problem. Unlike children who come to the learning environment because they have to and are there to learn content which will be used in the future, adults come when they are ready and need to resolve a particular problem. Most importantly, they bring a wealth of experience to the learning environment. Andragogy is based upon the following four assumptions:

1. Changes in Self Concept: This assumption is that as a person grows and matures his or her (sic) self-concept moves from one of total dependency (as is the reality of the infant) to one of increasing self directedness.
2. The Role of Experience: This assumption is that as an individual matures he/she (sic) accumulates an expanding reservoir of experience that causes him/her (sic) to become an increasingly rich resource for learning, ad at the same time provides him/her(sic) with a broadening base to which to relate new learning
3. Readiness to Learn: This assumption is that as an individual matures, his/her(sic) readiness to learn is decreasingly the product of his/her (sic) biological development and academic pressure ad is increasingly the product of the developmental tasks required for the performance of his/her (sic) evolving social roles.
4. Orientation to Learning: This assumption is that as children have been conditioned to have a subject-centered orientation to most learning whereas adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning.

These sets of assumptions are often discussed by adult educators as an aim for creating learning environments that are reflective of adult needs. Adult learner's social roles as determined by their jobs and status in society are those experiences that educators seek to incorporate in the learning environment. Adult educators begin making association's between one's experiences and the course content. The goal of the adult educator then is to create environments in which the adults experiences are acknowledged and valued.

Multiculturalism

In the past fifteen years in the United States there has been increasing concern placed upon the need to address the multiple cultural needs of learners and workers in all settings. Educators as well as those in other areas of society have become increasingly interested in incorporating a multicultural perspective (also referred to as diversity or cross-cultural). Multiculturalists advocate that the American culture is a "mosaic or a tossed salad, made up of many groups with different characteristics." (Cusher et al., 1992) They see the "real American' . . . as one of many kinds of Americans, although one who often has considerably more power than others . . . Therefore they believe that it is the role of schooling to encourage, preserve, and protect differences." (Cusher et.al, 1992) Culture explains why people behave, think, and speak in a particular way. An understanding of culture and cultural differences is therefore seen as an objective of educators working with various groups of people associated with similar characteristics.

Multiculturalists view oppression as the act of submission by some minorities to those in the majority. They further contend that being a minority does not necessarily mean that one is oppressed. Therefore the term minority cannot be used to describe all oppressed individuals. This term then is used to express the difference between "the real American" and those who are not.

Africentric Feminist Epistemology: Giving Voice, A Womanist Perspective

Hill-Collins (1990) describes a research methodology aimed at collecting and analyzing data obtained from persons that have been marginalized. This method involves an acknowledgment of a way of knowing that is not grounded in western linear traditions. The Africentric feminist epistemology attempts to provide a medium through which one's interpretation of behavior and thought is grounded in the history, culture, economics, race, gender, language, sexual orientation, and religion of those involved in the research. According to Hill-Collins an "Africanists analysis of the Black experience generally agree on the fundamental elements of an Africentric standpoint." She further states that:

> In spite of varying histories, Black societies reflect elements of a core African value system that existed prior to and independently of racial oppression . . . These similarities in material conditions have fostered shared Africentric values that permeate the family structure, religious institutions, culture and community life of Blacks in varying parts of Africa, the Caribbean, South American, and North America. This consciousness permeates the shared history of people of African descent through the framework of a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology.

It is the intersection of these positions or realities that ultimately effects the way that one interprets, speaks, and reads the word and the world.

The Africentric feminist perspective is distinct from feminist perspectives in that it acknowledges the distinguishing effects of race, class, gender and other "isms;" while the feminist perspective acknowledges the distinguishing effects of gender and class. While gender and class issues effect European American women, African American women, Asian American women, Native American women, Latina women--all women--at differing points and times, each woman has distinct understandings of them. Hill-Collins concludes that. "Since Black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black woman's standpoint reflects elements of both traditions." (And I would add that this is true for all women.)

While these perspectives are not mutually exclusive it is important to note that the Africentric feminist perspective emphasizes the intersection of multiple realities. These multiple realities are interwoven into a unifying whole. These realities contradict, yet complement each other--they are non-dichotomous.

They are intersecting and interwoven points of reality--they are polyrhythmic. In other words, one's experiences can be described as simultaneously intersecting realities. People move in

multiple directions at once.

Polyrhythms reflect the aesthetic essence of African art, music, dance and language. It is the multiple rhythms that flow and course through one's being. It ultimately induces a sense of self understanding and self worth which is reflected in one's words and thoughts. An understanding of these multiple standpoints or polyrhythms helps one determine what is required to survive in an otherwise unfamiliar, yet familiar and often hostile environment. The model below represents the intersecting polyrhythmic realities based upon the Africentric feminist deconstruction of an individuals world view.

'Gumba ya ya,' a term used by Tisch (Barkeley-Brown, 1990) which means 'everybody talking at once' appropriately describes the intersection of multiple realities. In other words, these multiple perspectives intersect simultaneously and help us interpret the word and the world. The following assumptions formulate the bases for acknowledging one's polyrhythmic realities within a learning environment:

1. Concrete experience is used as criterion of meaning: The experiences of marginalized people have often been omitted from our text, thereby negating their history, culture, race, gender, and economic worth. Concrete experiences is described as that knowledge and intuitive understanding of one's world and the words used to interpret the world. One uses knowledge which is grounded in a set of cultural, gender, economic, and racial norms. Knowledge along is not enough. One must apply wisdom which then is used with knowledge of one's self in relation to the multiple reflecting realities. This then is used to help one to read, speak, and interpret the word and the world.
2. Dialogue is the basis for assessing knowledge claims: The ability to share or communicate one's knowledge with others is the basis upon which we ultimately begin to understand our selves as well as others. We each take responsibility for the statements we use to communicate our way of knowing and understanding the word and the world. Connectedness rather than separation is gained through this communication process.
3. An ethic of caring which emphasizes the uniqueness of individuals, elicits appropriate emotion from the dialogue, and recognizes empathetic understanding: Caring for others and how it effects others is critical to this process. In the African American church the "call and response" is used to emote a particular feeling and sense of understanding the "word". For example, the preacher speaks in very emotional tones and pitches. He interprets and articulates the word in such a way as to emote a response from the congregation. The response often comes in the form of an "Aman," "Yes Lord," "Preach it brother." In other words the preacher puts out a call in the form of a parable that the congregation can relate to within their everyday lives. The congregation responds to and acknowledges that they understand what the minister has said. In the classroom, the call and response takes place through critical reflection and questions that place the

text and the words of those speaking them in a historical, political, economical, and social context. The teacher and/or students make the call and then respond to one another.

4. An ethic of personal accountability. As one learns to speak and share their experiences, knowledge and wisdom with one another, they must recognize that they have to take responsibility for ensuring that it's interpretation is understood by all. They must further recognize the effect of misinformation or mis-education of those who have not engaged in the discourse or dialogue. They have a personal and professional obligation to speak and interpret the word in such a way that they acknowledge and respect other ways of knowing and interpreting the word and the world.

These assumptions provide the framework for giving voice. To give voice requires the relinquishing of predetermined and prescriptive forms of teaching and learning. It requires that the teacher understand his or her polyrhythmic realities and provide the students with opportunities to explore their own realities. In order to give voice the teacher must understand that they have the power and control over others.

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) refer to the exercising of power and control over others as hegemony. Hegemony "is a process of continuous creation and includes the constant structuring of consciousness." (p. 88) Moreover, it happens "systematically through and within the educational, political, social and cultural arenas." (Sheared, 1992) The teacher is the hegemonic mediator and dispenser of "knowledge". Therefore the teacher must take responsibility for finding strategies and techniques for giving voice. To give voice then means that the teacher understands that even though he/she is currently operating from a position of power and control while in the classroom, s/he has only temporal control over those who are in the margin. Even though the students are in the margin, this does not mean that they are only operating from a marginalized standpoint. Learners also have ways of exercising power - both within and outside of the learning environment. The teacher and students take responsibility for what is learned and how it is learned. The diagram below represents hegemony:

Giving voice is not divorced from content but rather promotes an understanding of the content and further seeks to underscore its significance in determining who's knowledge gets heard and acknowledged in the discourse. Giving voice means that the teacher attempts to move from the center into the margin. Students are giving an opportunity to share their understandings of the word and the world through dialogue.

As they engage in the "call and response," they gradually begin to take responsibility for reading and interpreting the word. They slowly begin to understand that they are the authors of their own histories, cultures, languages, economics. It is through the shifting of margins and centers that learners and teacher begin to uncover their realities with one another. As our multiple realities are acknowledged we begin to see how these realities have helped shape the way we read and interpret the word and the world.

Summary: Andragogy and Africentric Perspectives Contribution to the Field of Adult Education

Adult educators refer to the education of adults as andragogy. The application of this term to describe adult learning suggests that one is cognizant of the need to explore and use the experiences of adults when engaged in providing them educational opportunties. One's experiences are viewed as one of many factors that contribute to the way adults process and use knowledge in the learning environment. Andragogy differentiates adults reasons for learning from children's reasons for learning. Adults are problem centered, while children are subject centered. Adults are self-directed and know what they need to learn, while children are other directed and rely on others to determine what needs to be learned.

While the concept of andragogy provides us with a paradigm for differentiating between adult and childhood learning, it fails to acknowledge the lived experiences of the learners. One's lived experiences are grounded in race, class, gender, and other factors that contribute to their understanding of the process for producing knowledge.

It is the Womanist perspective that provides us with a framework for understanding the effect of one's lived experiences upon learning and the learning environment. Even though multiculturalists acknowledge culture and its effect on learning, it compartmentalizes the learners experiences into cultural norms. Oppression is viewed as that which effects only minorities, as oppossed to those who oppress. Cultural experiences are the only ones that educators examine within and outside of the learning environment.

Giving voice means that all learner's experiences are factored into the narrative discourse that occurs both in class and throughout the curriculum. According to Sheared(1994), "our goal as adult educators is to find ways in which we can uncover and acknowledge the voice of each student, to recognize that we, like our students, bring polyryhthmic realities to the learning environment; to find ways of disempowering ourselves in the learning environment so that students began to take responsibility for their learning. Moreover, we must understand that the information we proffer is grounded in a political, social, historical, sexual, racial and economical context and, that it is unique to us (in other words, we recognize that our subjective understanding of the world are different yet interconnected.)" (p. 31)

Andragogy assumes that the teacher is in control and maintains control over what knowledge is presented and understood. On the other hand giving voice assumes that knowledge is subjective and that teaching practices are grounded in prescriptive and predetermined normatives. Until we as educators begin to reexamine and assess these normatives, the perpetuation of the negation of other ways of knowing will a way of knowing that negates other ways of knowing.

We must acknowledge that knowledge is inherently politcized and serves to socialize and condition behavior. These normatives which often negate the voices of those who lack power and control over the discourse, must therefore be reassessed and analyzed, by both teacher and students. This means that adult educators must formerly acknowledge their inherent domination

over the students and the knowledge that is introduced to the learner. Together, they should engage in an examination of how their lived experiences effect the way they read, speak, and interpret the word and the world. The reexamination of normatives and polyryhtmic realities will provide the educator and the learner with opportunities for interpreting knowledge based on a reconceptualization of 'what was and what is'.

Giving voice clearly allows the learner and teacher with an opportunity to communicate their oppositional worldviews. An understanding of these world views is essential to the interpretation of how their educational, political, historical, and social realities contribute to creating adult learning communities. Giving voice promotes connectedness while acknowledging the inherent uniqueness of the learner as well as the facilitator.

Andragogy acknowledges the learner experiences, but fails to address the teachers experiences. Andragogy assumes that all learners are self-directed. Africentric feminists perspectives also assumes that the learner is capable and able to determine what is and what ought to be, since they have lived in a world that has required them to develop an oppositional world view. It is that world view that then informs their understanding of the word and the world. This way of understanding is not necessarily factored into the andragogical interpretation of the learner; and is often percieved to be an inferior process by those operating from the center. They percieve that what is taught is objective truth. Even though this truth is assumed to be a universal given, it in fact is based upon the logical-positivist construction of reality. The andragogical perspective acknowledges this universal truth, while the Africentric feminists reframes and reexamines that truth in relation to its socio-historical, political, and economical antecedents.

Even though there are some apparent differences between the way that Africentric feminists and advocates of andragogy refer to the learner's experiences, there clearly are some sound precepts that adult educators can use from each.

It is clear that if educators of adult learners are going to use the experiences of the learners to foster learning, then we must begin reframing and reconceptualizing the way we view these experiences. Finally, we must seek ways to shift the center and margins so that the learners as well as our own experiences can be reexamined to determine the degree to which each one of us contributes to our own as well as the learners education or mis-education.

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i. "Womanism is a commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people--men and women--as well as to the valorization of women's works in all their varieties and multitudes". (Walker, 1984)

ii. According to Sheared (1992) marginalization is the silencing of "others" by the dominant culture and it commatizes or negates their political, economic, historical, and social status within society. The following characteristics describe those who are marginalized:

1. Marginality co-opts or obfuscates individuality. People give up that which is unique to who they are, and take on the characteristics of the dominant other.
2. Appropriate resources cannot be given to that which does not exist.
3. Without appropriate resources or a voice in the decisions that are made, marginalized people's needs and concerns will not be entered into the discourse of change.
4. Marginalization excludes women's and other oppressed group's knowledge and understandings.
5. The historical uniqueness or the individual is forfeited in favor of a larger good. Factors that contribute to an understanding of the individual are diffused among many other factors.

iii. Among Africentric feminists and Africentric scholars, this term is being used to address the ways in which people of African ancestry construct their world views. Several terms are used by these scholars to denote a way of thinking and understanding the world. According to Nobles (1992):

> Afrocentric, Africentric, or African Centered are interchangeable terms representing the concept which categorizing a 'quality of thought and practice' which is rooted in the cultural image and interest of people of African ancestry and which represents and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of people of African ancestry as the center of analysis. It represents the core and fundamental quality of the 'Beingness' and 'Becoming' of people of African ancestry. In essence, Afrocentricity represents the fact that as human beings, people of African ancestry have the right and responsibility to 'center' themselves in their own subjective possibilities and potential and through the recentering process reproduce and refine the best of themselves.

Asante (1990) goes further to state that:

> Afrocentricity is the belief in the centrality of Africans in post modern history. It is our history, our mythology, our creative motif and out ethos exemplifying our

collective will. . . ou are its ultimate test. You test its authenticity by incorporating it into your behavior. At the apex of your consciousness, it becomes your life because everything you do, it is.